CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION (TO B.C. 221)

ORIGIN OF THE CHINESE

beginnings of the Chinese, like those of other ancient peoples, are shrouded in obscuritwChinese literature, although voluminous during most of the past twenty-three or twenty-four centuries, gives us little incontestable information concerning the origins pf the people and their culture. What many modern scholars hold to be the earliest written documents that have come down to us—contained chiefly in the collection known as the *Shihgjiing,* or Classic of Poetry, and in portions of the *Shu Ching,* ofi^lassic of History*—show a culture which was far from primitive and was presumably the result of centuries of development^Within the last few years, archeology has unearthed important information, but as yet this is too fragmentary to be made the basis for much more than interesting conjectures. Future discoveries may revolutionize present theories. Some scholars have sought light in an analysis of the primitive Chinese written characters, or in deductions from the nature of the earliest known civilization. The Chinese myths akin to those by which other peoples have sought to account for the existence of the universe and of mankind, and for the origin of themselves and of their culture, probably complicate rather than simplify the confusion. Until very recently Chinese scholars—so deeply concerned with most other periods

of their history—were but little interested in the question of beginnings. It has been Western scholars of the past two and a half centuries and Chinese scholars of the present century who have been the most exercised by it. The theories advanced by the Occidental savants have been

[1] Even the earliest sections of the *Shu Ching* are now thought by many scholars not to be so ancient as the oldest poems of the *Shih Ching.*